



The R&A is using classic clubs like Royal Birkdale, which hosted The Open Championship in 2008, as an example for other clubs to follow regarding reduced water usage

BY ANTHONY PIOPPA,
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

In the British Isles and Europe, The Royal and Ancient Golf Club has been trumpeting the same message, especially through its venues that host the Open Championship. In the United States, the PGA Tour and the LPGA Tour have been doing their parts by insisting host clubs don't over-water their layouts so they can produce golf courses where golf balls roll on fairways and don't sit and spin back on every shot hit into a green.

Hylar made water conservation through sensible irrigation a priority during his first speech as USGA president during the organization's annual meeting last February when he told the assembled, "I believe our definition of playability should include concepts of

firm, fast, and yes, even brown, and allow the running game to flourish."

To some, the words sounded hollow. Following the speech, one prominent golf writer opined: "While Pebble Beach has a cutting-edge maintenance facility and other 'green' practices, we're still likely to see a very green golf course this June."

But Hylar stuck to his word, and people didn't see a very green golf course.

The USGA took the opportunity during the tournament to explain to viewers why the course looked the way it did during a two-minute piece broadcast on NBC that highlighted the benefits of water reduction. Announcer Dan Hicks interviewed Hylar live.

"We talked about that we're really trying to raise the awareness level," Hylar says.

Hylar has also repeatedly lauded the USGA Green Section for the work it has been doing to reduce water usage. He calls the Green Section, "our best-kept secret."

It's a strategy The R&A has been using for years — holding up the classic links layouts as an example for others to follow.

"The greatest thing is we can use the Open venue as an example of what can be achieved," said Steve Isaac, director of golf course management for The R&A.

The American tours have been practicing water conservation one venue at a time.

On the LPGA Tour, for instance, the association insists that balls don't plug into fairways. Golf shots coming into greens — depending if they are hit out of the fairway, light rough or deep rough — should hold, bounce and hold or roll, says certified golf course superintendent John Miller, the LPGA Tour agronomist.

Miller says the goal is "to put down as much water as a plant needs to survive until the next watering."

Cal Roth, senior vice president of agronomy for the PGA Tour, oversees the conditions of all the tour stops.

"We want a site to be as firm as we can get it without hurting the golf course," he says. "We try and dial down the system."

Miller and Roth usually deal with venues that have hosted events for several years. It's the new sites where the push back to the agronomic practices occurs.

"It's mostly an education process," Roth says.

Adds Miller, "The big fear is we're going to cut off the water completely."

Another reason for the hesitation to change is that clubs are worried about how their courses are portrayed.

"They say, 'We want our golf course to look great on TV'; they want to portray lush and green," Miller says. "There are other ways to look lush and green besides water."

Miller's most problematic venues typically occur at LPGA sites out of the country. In 2010, events were held in Malaysia, South Korea, Thailand, Mexico and Brazil.

He named Mission Hills Country Club in Rancho Mirage, Calif., and Superstition Mountain (Ariz.) Golf Club as two of the sites that are best at reducing water usage.

Roth, who has been with the PGA Tour for 35 years, says some clubs have disregarded the directives a few times.

"We've had water run at night that wasn't supposed to be," he adds, noting that during his tenure he has witnessed an overall rise in the acceptance of reduced irrigation practices. "But it's pretty rare they go against what we recommend. For the most part, the guys we work with are doing a lot better job now. I've been around long enough to see trends and changes."

Part of the reason for the transformation is the new technology that

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allows superintendents to be better at water management.

Roth says moisture meters were used at East Lake Golf Club for the Tour Championship this year — not just on greens, but also on fairway landing areas.

“It allowed them to see how they can take [water] down on a daily basis,” Roth says. “They could see how low they could go and still maintain a healthy surface.”

Since 2008, all PGA Tour agronomists carry moisture meters for monitoring putting greens and a number of superintendents at the sites have purchased their own meters.

“It’s improved our efficiency at maintaining greens,” Roth says.

The R&A, besides staging the Open and British Senior Open, also conducts a number of amateur events and oversees Open qualifiers around the world. Many times those clubs are hesitant to follow The R&A’s guidelines fearing turf will be damaged.

“There is some concern by the venues that if we have a very, very dry year, we’re going to tip them over the edge, but we’re careful of that,” Isaac says. “We know we’re borrowing the course for a week. We don’t want to get to the point where we lose greens.”

The lesson The R&A tries to instill — not just on its tournament venues but on all golf courses — is that reducing irrigation and practicing sustainable golf can be implemented everywhere.

“Not every course is a links, but the basic principals still apply,” Isaac says.

He points to Kingston Heath in Australia, which hosted a 2010 regional Open qualifying tournament as a perfect example.

“That golf course typifies links conditioning in an inland setting,” he says.

That word must spread for the message to get across to the general public.

“It’s golfer education we need to embark on, and the USGA has done a great job on that,” Isaac says.

For The R&A, the message is being disseminated via the Web site www.bestcourseforgolf.org, with separate paths on the site for greenkeepers, administrators and golfers to follow.

The USGA’s Hyler continues to preach the word around the country.

“This is not the kind of thing you say one time,” Hyler says. “I’m not suggesting golf courses be brown; I’m suggesting you reduce water use.”

One problem Hyler

has come up against is that so many golf courses in the United States are tied to real estate, and in those situations a green layout is considered a selling point.

Another obstacle is TV golf announcers, many of whom laud a lush, green golf course as if that is the ideal condition.

“Commentator education, I don’t know who does that, but it would be useful,” Isaac says. “When viewers listen to commentators, they accept them as experts.”

The LPGA’s Miller is of the same mind.

“We’ve got to sell it to the Golf Channel people,” he says, adding that he rarely has the opportunity to chat with the announcers since he’s only occasionally at the venue when the tournament is being played. “The good news is we have the same commentators. The bad point is that I’m out ahead so I don’t get a chance to see them.”

He knows that the “brown” word hasn’t yet permeated the thinking of most announcers or viewers.

“To the average golfer watching on TV ... green means healthy,” Miller says. “And brown means unhealthy.”

There is, however, hope that golfers are coming around to the idea that what they view as the ideal, is in fact, impractical.

“It’s not as fast as I would like it to be,” says the PGA’s Roth of the change in thinking. “My opinion is that the general public thinks green is good.”

Miller foresees a long journey.

“We didn’t get into this overnight; we won’t get out of it overnight,” Miller says, warning that success isn’t guaranteed. “We can do a great job selling it, but if the end user’s not willing to accept it, we’ve run up against a brick wall.” ■

USGA President Jim Hyler just wants to see golf courses reduce their water use.

Pioppi is a longtime Golfdom contributing editor who prefers a firm and fast lawn at his home in Middletown, Conn.



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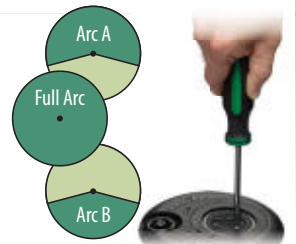
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PT 3

Talking Herbicides

Manufacturers discuss what herbicides will be used in 20 years

Question: What kind of herbicides do you think superintendents will use 20 years from now?



Kyle Miller, Senior Technical Specialist, BASF Turf & Ornamentals • It's becoming increasingly difficult to register new active ingredients with all of the requirements and pressures imposed by the EPA and anti-pesticide groups. We will continue to see pesticides banned from certain use sites, making it more difficult for superintendents to manage their turfgrass. I expect new active ingredients over the next 20 years to be more weed-specific and less broad-spectrum. We'll also see a continuation of three- and four-way mixes to provide one product to control grasses, broadleaves and sedges.

S. Gary Custis, Manager of Field and Technical Services, PBI/Gordon • One big issue happening in the near future will be restrictions on volatile organic chemicals, which will change available formulations. Some materials may no longer be available if they can't be reformulated. Looking out 20 years is nearly impossible. We can only speculate on the trends, because new regulations will change the playing field. We can assume superintendents will be doing more with less.



Owen Towne, President, Phoenix Environmental Care • Herbicides — including 2,4-D, other phenoxies, prodiamine, dithiopyr, pendimethalin, dicamba, MCPP and MCPA — that were market leaders 20 years ago are still the predominant products in use today. Twenty years from now, if superintendents are using different products, their choices will be driven by a combination of innovation in chemistry and a reduction in product availability driven by regulatory concerns.



Editor's note: In September, October and November, Golfdom has featured a three-part question-and-answer series on herbicide technology. In each segment, representatives from the industry's vast number of chemical companies will be asked one question in regard to herbicide technology. The representatives' answers will be listed along with their photos.

Matt Bradley, Herbicide Marketing Manager, Bayer Environmental Science • This is very difficult to know as there are always weed shifts over time when the same types of chemistry are used over and over. We are always striving to bring new modes of action to the market to help mitigate these types of issues, but once you have one problem solved another one shows up. This will ultimately dictate what types of products will be used in the future.



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Talking Herbicides

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Scott Cole, Golf Market Manager, Syngenta • Though we all wish we had a crystal ball to accurately predict the future, signs seem to indicate the need for herbicides that deliver reduced risk, low environmental impact, efficient rates and predictable results will only continue. For our part, Syngenta will not only continue to develop products to meet that need, we will support industry initiatives that highlight the importance of environmental stewardship in golf, and to demonstrate that courses can enhance and be compatible with the environment.



Mark Urbanowski, Portfolio Marketing Leader of Turf and Ornamental, DowAgrosciences • It's possible there will be herbicide-tolerant turfgrasses. While today it seems like a stretch, there is potential. There will be application technologies in the future that we haven't even thought of yet — encapsulation technologies, better granular applications, etc.



Adam Manwarren, Product Manager of Turf & Ornamental, FMC Professional Solutions • More combinations of existing actives, but it's not just simply tank mixes. Anyone can do that. The innovation is re-engineering and reformulating actives to perform differently and better. One example might be a granule application that releases one active today and another active in 30, 60 or 90 days, which saves on application costs (time, equipment and labor). Plus, I think many of the herbicides we're using will be packaged in more recyclable containers or pouches that significantly reduce the amount of plastic used.

Todd Bunnell, Turf and Ornamental Research Manager/Golf Market Manager., SePRO • New active ingredients and modes of action will enter the turfgrass market. However, these new herbicides will likely have a more narrow spectrum of control. This will lead to more combinations of active ingredients and modes of action to broaden the weed spectrum.

Doug Houseworth, Technical Service Manager, Arysta LifeScience North America • Herbicides of the future will most likely be combinations that work post-emergence and pre-emergence that can be applied at any stage of weed growth and be tailored to the geographical region of use.

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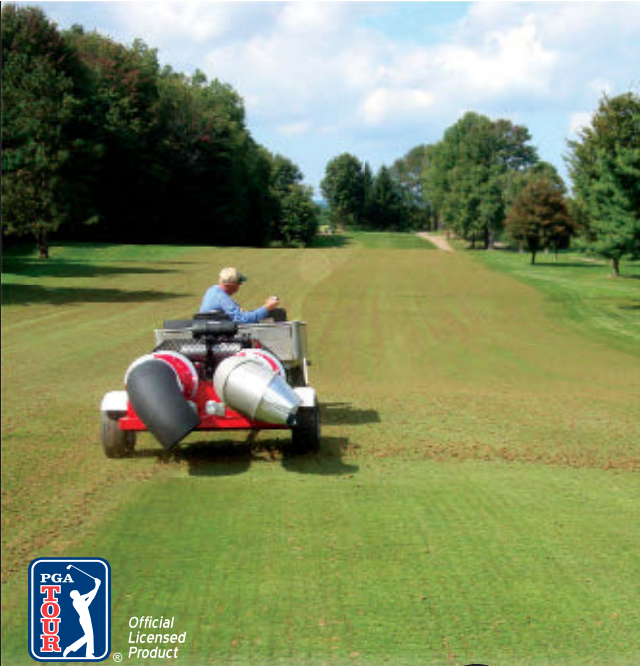



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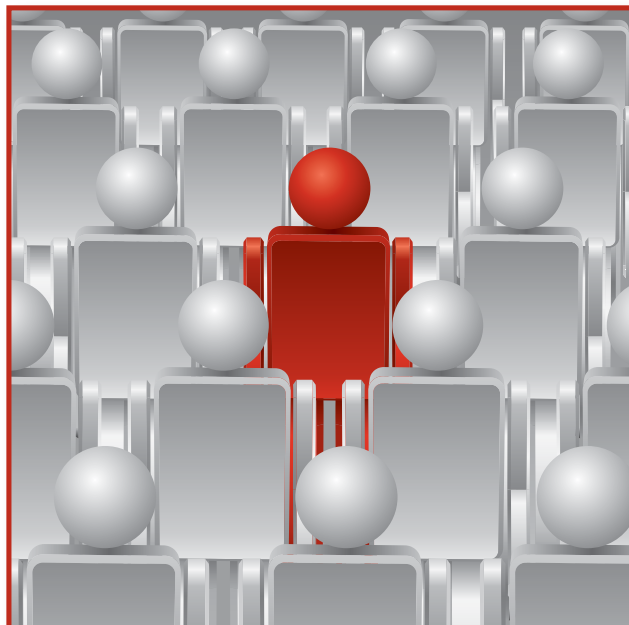
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Talking Herbicides

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Russ Mitchell, Product and Marketing Director, Quali-Pro •

In 20 years, most of the same products used today will still be used. There will be additions and combinations and progress is ever moving forward. But if you look at the last 20 years, new products come and some old products go but the majority of the products continue in the mix. That's because they're efficacious and safe when used properly. Even when new chemistries are added in combinations to increase activity or speed, the standard products we've used for years continue to be the backbone of the herbicide market.



Nancy Schwartz, Marketing Manager of Turf and Ornamentals, DuPont Professional Products • I

think that [superintendents] will continue to choose products that meet their high standards of performance but also meet the challenge of being kind to the environment. The industry is making great strides in finding this balance with its current R&D efforts, and I can only imagine the value that chemistries will deliver 20 years from now.



Jason Fausey, Regional Field Development Manager, Valent Professional Products •

I envision a mix of newer products with some of the traditional chemistry that has been used the last 60 years in the turf industry to control weeds. Newer products tend to be very selective and may have the ability to control a targeted weed or two, whereas the older products, especially when applied in combinations, tend to provide control for an array of weeds. ■

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2.0 Golf and Country Club Concept to Go National

In an attempt to prop up the sagging golf business, Shyster Enterprises is pleased to announce the formation of 2.0 Golf, a joint venture with award-winning hedge fund manager Too Big To Fail.

"This is an exciting day for me," hipster CEO Steve Heathen said before ringing the opening bell on Wall Street. "Ever since I read Jerry Tarde's column in the October Golf Digest revealing the reasons country clubs were dying, I've been looking for ways to rebrand the golfing experience into something relatable to the next generation. I'm in the value delivery business, and I see opportunity here."

Heathen, best known for his efforts to attract young players to lawn bowling by eliminating white outerwear rules and blasting hip-hop through speakers, sees 2.0 Golf's new country club concept bringing a younger audience to golf. The concept is simple: Purchase ailing properties with at least 50 percent of its membership filled, followed by the relaxing of club rules. Then leverage the purchases with credit default swaps to ensure that Too Big To Fail profits, no matter what happens to the properties themselves.

"It's a win-win for Shyster and Too Big To Fail," said Heathen, who is excited by some of the ideas behind 2.0 Golf.

"According to Golf Digest's survey, denim is not allowed at 63 percent of private clubs," said Heathen, who doesn't actually play golf even though he has a nine-hole layout on his

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BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



Bridghampton compound. "We see at least 20 percent growth across the board just by loosening up that rule.

"Forty-six percent of private courses don't allow cargo shorts. I mean, talk about a buzzkill for anyone under 25."

Heathen said the key to growing the game lies in 2.0 Golf's ability to re-invent the country club's willingness to embrace American's reliance on connectivity.

"Seventeen percent of private clubs, according to Golf Digest, don't permit cell-phone use," he said. "We think that number is low and more like 20 percent. We see a chance to lift that rule, create on-site business centers, and, in general, allow the golfer to relax by coming to the course to do business. It's the wonderful way of life we have now and, with our good friends at Too Big To Fail's support, we see steady growth for the next 20 years in converting country clubs to more frenetic, hip and stressful places to be."

2.0 Golf unveiled its logo, a silhouette of a young man, looking like a cross between Rickie Fowler and Justin Bieber, with his head down while sending a text message. He has a golf club tucked under his arm and his hat on backwards.

"The hat on backwards is key," Heathen said. "According to Golf Digest, 69 percent of private clubs have banned the wearing of backward hats. No wonder the golf business is in the toilet."

This is hedge fund Too Big To Fail's first foray into golf.

"We've done our homework and see that golf is really not about the actual playing of the game," said the company's head sports fund manager, Tyler Schmucker. "It's about the less-relaxing experience, the ability to do business and most of all, value creation for investors. For too long, the golf industry has shied away from embracing 'the now.' We will create value that ensures at least a 7 percent return no matter what happens to the properties we purchase."

Schmucker also sees great waste on the maintenance side of the golf business. "We will trim a lot there," he said. "We just don't see the golfers wanting great conditions. They want to be able to send a text message from the seventh tee. If it's cut at 1 inch or not at all is really secondary."

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